

at the entire suite of characteristics. I therefore compiled some characteristics of the Greater White-fronted, the Western Greylag, and the observed hybrid geese (Table 1). It is clear when comparing the traits in the table that the hybrid inure closely resembles the Greater White-fronted Goose than the Western Greylag Goose.

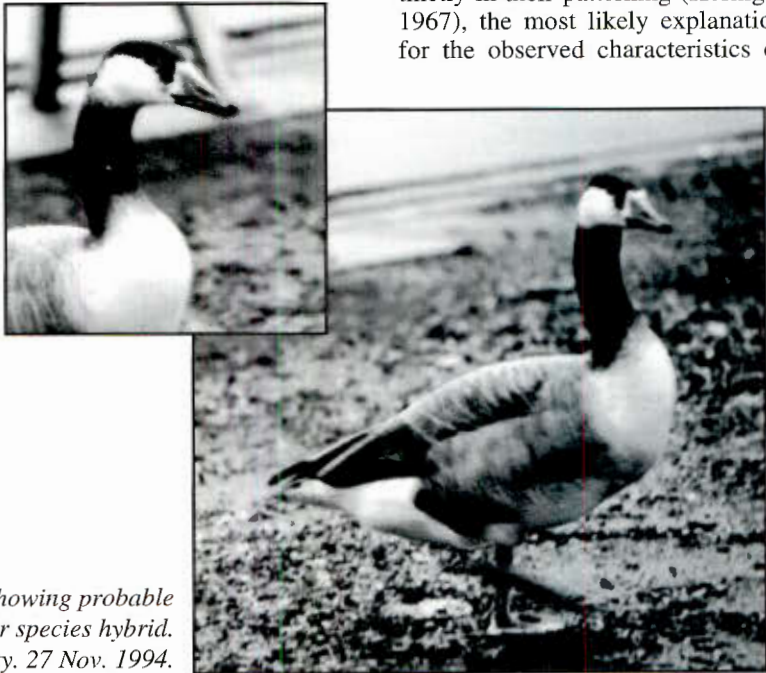
First, though Mr. Montgomery is correct when he mentions that bill color ranges from pink to orange in both the Greylag and the White-fronted Goose (see his references), the **subspecies** of each goose involved is critically important when comparing bill colors. The Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons frontalis*) is the form found in all of North America except Alaska, and this subspecies has a pink bill (Ely and Dzabin 1994). The only member of this species with a truly orange bill is the Greenland race (*A. a. falvirostris*), and it is extremely unlikely that this subspecies could have been available to pair with a Canada Goose on the Mississippi Flyway. The Western Greylag (*Anser anser anser*), and its domestic derivatives, has an orange bill (Delacour 1954). The hybrid's pink bill suggests a Greater White-fronted Goose parent.

Mr. Montgomery is also correct in pointing out the problems of color perception in the differentiation of White-fronted Goose races. The gray, diffuse light of the day on which my original color photos (printed in black and white in *Meadowlark*) were taken was just about ideal for accurate rendering of the colors of the geese. Also, many observers at the zoo on both days the goose was present commented on the bird's pink bill.

Second, the color of the hybrid's face is very suggestive of a White-

fronted Goose parent. The distinct white band visible above the bill on the hybrid is a diagnostic feature of *Anser albifrons*, and is not seen on any form of *Anser anser*.

Third, the legs and feet of the hybrid were a distinct orange color. All races of the Greylag, whatever their bill color, possess pink leg and feet, while all races of the White-fronted, whatever their bill color, possess orange legs and feet. As hybrid *Anseriformes* usually show characteristics of both parent species distinctly in their patterning (Korhight 1967), the most likely explanation for the observed characteristics of



Nancy Bent photos showing probable  
*Branta X Anser* species hybrid.  
Brookfield Zoo, Cook County. 27 Nov. 1994.

**Table 1:** Selected characteristics of two species of *Anser* and an observed hybrid *Branta X Anser* goose at Brookfield Zoo, 27-28 November 1994.

Characteristic	Greater White-fronted Goose ( <i>Anser albifrons frontalis</i> )	Hybrid <i>Branta X Anser</i>	Western Greylag Goose ( <i>Anser anser anser</i> )
Bill	pinkish with light orange wash above nostrils, nail cream to tan, pink	pink, paler around nostrils, dark tip around nail	orange, narrow strip of flesh color behind nail and along culmen
Face	band of white feathers at base of bill, large white patch on fore crown and sides of face <sup>2</sup>	band of white feathers at base of bill <sup>4</sup>	ashy brown <sup>1</sup> , brownish grey <sup>3</sup>
Legs and Feet	orange to reddish, orange <sup>1</sup> , orange <sup>3</sup>	orange <sup>4</sup>	pink <sup>2</sup> pink <sup>3</sup>

1. Ely and Dzubin 1994    2. Delacour 1954    3. Owen 1980    4. Bent 1995, unpublished color photographs